

Housing meeting in Bloomington City Hall dispels Section 8 myths

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A shortage of **affordable** housing in Monroe County has compelled local community organizations to inform landlords about Section 8 housing options.

There have been 344 new families provided with Section 8 housing this year, but with 100 families on a wait list, there is a need for more housing availability.

Tuesday evening's informational session titled "There's No Place Like Home: Information and Opportunities for Rental Property Owners/Managers" brought together Section 8 tenants, landlords and authorities to discuss and dispel myths attached to Section 8 housing.

One of the main misconceptions identified by the Bloomington Housing Authority was that Section 8 tenants are lazy and unwilling to work for a better life, BHA supervisor Janet Tyree said.

Tyree said about 57 percent of Section 8 tenants are elderly or disabled, but of that 57 percent, almost 20 percent are employed and have an adequate income to pay rental expenses.

"During the last year, out of 1,339 households, only six families were evicted," Tyree said. "That's less than 1 percent."

Section 8 tenant Tracey Hodge has been receiving Section 8 assistance for seven and a half years and feels that her quality of life has greatly improved because of the availability of Section 8 housing.

"It provides stability for my son and myself," Hodge said. "We are not a family that needs to bounce around anymore or live with family members when struggling with our income."

However, Hodge added the availability of Section 8 housing is not what it used to be in Monroe County.

“Even if you have a voucher, it is hard to find a place with an acceptable rent value,” she said. “There have been many options for Section 8 that have gone away.”

With many potential Section 8 landlords in attendance, the meeting highlighted the personal experience of single family property owner Dave Thompson, who leases some of his properties to Section 8 families.

He encouraged landlords to participate in the program.

Thompson emphasized that there is also a large number of families participating in Section 8 who are willing to rent from participating landlords.

“In reality, there are 1,200-plus tenants renewing and looking for a place to live each year,” Thompson said. “And it may be your house.”

One problem with providing Section 8 housing was brought up by Nikki Jenkins, property manager for Canterbury House.

“We are not always given a rent raise each year,” Jenkins said. “So currently we can only take vouchers for three-bedroom apartments.”

Thompson assured prospective landlords that Section 8 tenants are generally on time with their co-payments of rent because they are grateful to have Section 8 housing.

“You don’t want to lose what has been a blessing to you,” he said. “It’s a real joy to see families get themselves off of the program and better themselves.”